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US-CDC supports Rivers State with integrated HIV, TB, COVID-19 screening, and service delivery.

The Country Director of the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Dr. Mary Adetunke Boyd, said, "the triple epidemic of HIV, TB, and COVID-19 poses a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is that all three diseases are relentless, damaging, and continue to cost countless lives in our communities. However, because detection, treatment, and prevention exist and are readily available to us right here and right now, we have an opportunity to respond and save many lives." She made the statement during the launch of the Rivers State Integrated screening and service delivery for TB, HIV, and COVID-19, in Port Harcourt, on Tuesday, October 25.

With the support of the US-CDC, the integrated screening and service delivery for these three diseases aims to integrate COVID-19 screening into points where HIV and TB services are already being provided, thereby improving access to early detection and prevention, and mitigating the spread of COVID-19 in healthcare facilities and communities. In addition, this novel initiative will scale up the utilization of an Antigen-based Rapid Diagnostic Test (RDT) for timely and efficient triage, Infection Prevention Control (IPC), and accelerated vaccine uptake by creating additional access points and communication that promote the importance of the COVID-19 vaccines, thereby reducing the chances of severe illness and death.

She urged healthcare workers to be the champions against vaccine misinformation and disinformation, and to lead by example in promoting the use of vaccines against the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

To date, Nigeria has had three COVID-19 waves, and Rivers State has been deeply affected, reporting the 3rd most considerable burden of COVID-19 and COVID-19 deaths in the country. Moreover, due to the government's commitment to active surveillance, the data shows that each subsequent COVID-19 wave in Rivers has higher peaks in cases and deaths.

Dr. Boyd said, "while we battle the COVID-19 pandemic, other disease outbreaks didn't give us a break; instead, the intensity of cholera and environmental polio in Nigeria soared higher than we've

experienced in years. It reminds us that these devastating health threats are unpredictable, and even worse, if we are not ready to respond with agility."

Integrating screening and service delivery for COVID-19, HIV, and TB in Rivers State will also strengthen the health system to detect and respond robustly to emerging outbreaks while putting the patient at the center of healthcare service delivery.

Earlier, during a courtesy visit to the Honorable Commissioner of Health, Prof. Princewill Chike, and the Secretary to the Rivers State Government, Dr. Tammy Weneke Danagogo, the Country Director discussed efforts at supporting Rivers State towards tackling HIV, TB, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and other vaccine-preventable diseases. She commended the exemplary leadership of the state government towards the health sector leading to essential milestones in HIV epidemic control and the strong collaboration with US-CDC and its implementing partner, the Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN). CDC's robust support to the HIV response in Rivers has resulted in demonstrable progress, with the state attaining 90% treatment coverage within 24 months.

The Country Director noted the success recorded in Rivers despite the pandemic demonstrates the incredible resilience of the PEPFAR infrastructure, but she agreed with Rivers State government officials that these successes are at risk if programming for the other rampant preventable causes of death like tuberculosis and COVID-19 are not mainstreamed and addressed.

The U.S. Government is at the forefront of providing support to Rivers and other states in Nigeria for HIV epidemic control, TB elimination, and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through strong collaboration with the USG and other multilateral including WHO, UNICEF, and the Global Fund, integration of triple disease screening and service delivery for COVID-19, HIV, and TB will enable states like Rivers to close the HIV treatment gap further, increase COVID-19 vaccination and ultimately reduce infectious disease morbidity and mortality. To date, the U.S. has donated over 7.5 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to Nigeria.

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